

THE EUROPEAN TOURISM SECTOR EXCEEDS 2019 LEVELS



pandemic level.

Encouragingly, the European Travel Commission's (ETC) quarterly report reveals a robust recovery in the European tourism sector during the first quarter of 2024. This period's foreign arrivals and overnight stays surpassed the 2019 figures by 7.2% and 6.5%, respectively. This positive trend, which began in 2023, continues with foreign visits and nights only 1.2% and 0.2% below the pre-

This year, the recovery of European tourism is primarily propelled by significant intra-regional travel from key markets such as Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. **The United States, as the most crucial long-distance issuing market in Europe, also contributes to the demand.**

The first figures for 2024 paint a promising picture for European tourism. Consumer spending on travel is projected to surge across Europe, potentially reaching record levels in the coming months. Despite the challenges of high prices and geopolitical risks, the industry is poised for a strong recovery.

Regions' Recovery

The study reveals that European tourism recovery is steady but uneven across regions and source markets due to existing risks. Southern European destinations lead in terms of international visitors compared to 2019 levels. Serbia (+47%), Bulgaria (+39%), Turkey (+35%), Malta (+35%), Portugal (+17%) and Spain (+14%) are some of the countries that have experienced an increase in tourism activity.

The Nordic countries have also seen a surge in tourism activity, with overnight stays growing above pre-pandemic levels. Norway (+18%), Sweden (+12%), and Denmark (+9%) have seen an increase in tourism, partly due to winter sports tourism and the attractiveness of the Northern Lights.

On the other hand, countries in the Balkan region are lagging due to the challenges caused by the war in Ukraine. Latvia recorded the lowest post-pandemic international arrivals (-34%), followed by Estonia (-15%) and Lithuania (-14%).

Furthermore, the performance of long-distance markets has been uneven. The United States and Canada continue to dominate, reflecting the trends of 2023. The first quarter also saw increased number of travelers from Latin America, particularly Brazil.

Although Asia-Pacific is showing signs of improvement, the recovery remains modest and uneven. Chinese travelers are starting to return to Europe, while Japan's recovery remains slow.

Strong Demand

Inflation and geopolitical uncertainties are still significant concerns for the European tourism sector. However, consumer data suggests that travel will remain a priority in 2024. **Travelers are projected to spend €742.8 billion in Europe this year, a 14.3% increase from 2023.** This growth is due to inflation and changing travel preferences. Travelers may choose to go for more extended stays or more diverse experiences.

The ongoing war in Ukraine is still affecting tourist flows, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The war between Israel and Hamas is also significantly affecting travel from Israel to Europe, with Israeli arrivals down 54% year-on-year in the first quarter across all declared destinations.

For tourism professionals, the most significant challenges are accommodation costs (59%), business costs (52%), and staff shortages (52%).

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